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DAWN

Zardari assails Muslim minority persecution in India

• Gilgit-Baltistan marks its 78th Independence Day, celebrating liberation from Dogra rule and integration with Pakistan • President reaffirms support for Kashmiris living under 'occupation'; terms GB 'crown of Pakistan'

By Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: President Asif Ali Zardari, speaking at the 78th Independence Day celebrations in Gilgit-Baltistan on Saturday, lauded the freedom within Pakistan's autonomous regions, while contrasting it with the plight of India's Muslim minority, who he said are "facing the worst persecution at the hands of the ruling majority".

President Zardari drew a direct comparison to the situation in India-held Kashmir, underscoring the value of freedom and self-determination celebrated during the anniversary. "While we enjoy liberty and rights under the flag of Pakistan, they continue to face occupation," he said of Kashmiris.

"We stand with them until they too can live in freedom in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people." He also praised the founder, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for his vision in creating a separate homeland.

The president was the chief guest at the main ceremony in Gilgit, where he reaffirmed a "collective resolve" to transform Gilgit-Baltistan into a "model of development, justice and equality".

Celebrations took place across the region's 10 districts with flag-hoisting ceremonies, rallies and traditional sports, including polo, marking the day. The events paid tribute to the heroes of the 1947 liberation from the Kashmiri Dogra rulers, after which the independent state chose to join Pakistan.

"This region is not only the crown of Pakistan but also our northern gateway and a symbol of our lasting friendship with China," President Zardari said in his address.

He pointed to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a source of major new opportunities for the region.

"The CPEC has brought new opportunities for livelihood, trade and connectivity to GB. Our collective task is to ensure that these opportunities reach every valley and every village, creating shared prosperity for all."

The president emphasised GB's vast natural resources, particularly its potential for hydropower generation and tourism. He suggested a unique initiative to boost the local economy, proposing that the region could have its own airline.

"I was thinking that the kind of plane in which I came here — it is not very expensive. So if GB gets its own airline, then what's the harm in that?" he asked, adding that his party's efforts were focused on promoting the region's progress.

Highlighting the historic contributions of his PPP, President Zardari noted that former leaders Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto introduced key governance and administrative reforms in the region.

In his speech, GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan thanked the president for his participation and underscored the region's strategic importance. "GB people without foreign support were liberated from Dogra Raj and annexed with Pakistan unconditionally on the basis of religion," he said.

CM Khan also noted the long-standing desire of the Kashmiris to become a fully constitutional part of the country, arguing it would end their long-standing demand and "foil the conspiracies of India". Earlier, the day began with a flag-hoisting ceremony at the historic Chinar Bagh, where Governor Syed Mehdi Shah and CM Khan laid a wreath at the martyrs' memorial.

In his address, Governor Shah said, "1st November is a historical day of our freedom, sacrifice and self-determination, which gave us our identity."

The main ceremony included a military parade and cultural floats representing all three divisions of GB.

It was attended by Governor Shah, CM Khan, Corps Commander Lt Gen Ahsan Amir Nawaz, civil and military officials, and a large number of citizens from all walks of life.

With input from APP

PRESIDENT Asif Zardari along with Commander X-Corps Lt Gen Amer Ahsan Nawaz and Force Commander Northern Areas Maj Gen Imtiaz Hussain Gilani at the ceremony marking the 78th Independence Day of Gilgit-Baltistan on Saturday.—White Star

Special train leaves Larkana for Guru Nanak's birth anniversary

• Pilgrims bid farewell by Hindu Panchayat leaders before departure
• Pakistan issues over 2,100 visas to Indian Sikh pilgrims

By M.B. Kalhoro

LARKANA: Amid a festive atmosphere, a special train carrying hundreds of devotees left Larkana on Saturday for Nankana Sahib to participate in the 556th birth anniversary celebrations of Baba Guru Nanak.

A large number of pilgrims from Larkana and Qambar-Shahdadkot districts — including men, women, elders, and children — boarded the special train, as Hindu Panchayat Chairman Harish Lal, along with other community leaders, bid them farewell at the Larkana Railway Station before its departure for Rohri.

Once the special train reaches Rohri, its bogies will be attached to another train bound for the destination.

The devotees are expected to return on November 7 after attending the birthday rituals of Guru Nanak.

According to the Railway Station Master, the special train carrying 234 devotees left for Rohri under strict security arrangements supervised by Station Master Ayaz Abbasi, with the assistance of district police and railway police.

Meanwhile, the Punjab government has finalised all arrangements for the celebrations taking place from Nov 3 to 6 at Nankana Sahib.

A high-level delegation, comprising Chairman Cabinet Committee on Law and Order Khawaja Salman Rafique, Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, and Secretary Home Dr. Ahmad Javed Qazi, visited Nankana Sahib on Saturday to review the preparations.

Punjab Minister for Minorities Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora said the celebrations will begin with the Akhand Paath and culminate with the main event and Nagar Kirtan on November 5 at Gurdwara Janam Asthan.

He said around 30,000 pilgrims, including 2,100 from India, are expected, and all security and hospitality arrangements have been finalised.

Indian Sikh pilgrims have been issued visas for Pakistan, the first major allowance after travel between the arch-rival nations was frozen during conflict in May.

While there was no immediate response from New Delhi, Indian newspapers reported on Saturday that the government would allow "selected" groups to travel for a 10-day festival to celebrate the founder of the Sikh faith.

The Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi had issued "over 2,100 visas to Sikh pilgrims from India".

Schools closed in Nankana

A three-day holiday has been declared for all schools and colleges in Nankana City from November 4 to 6, while Baba Guru Nanak University will remain closed from November 3 to 6 for the birth anniversary celebrations.

Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique said special hospital wards in Lahore and Faisalabad will be set up to facilitate Sikh pilgrims attending Guru Nanak's birth celebrations.

With additional input from agencies.

Reshuffle in SC senior hierarchy

ISLAMABAD: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance internal governance and strengthen institutional efficiency, the Supreme Court on Saturday made several senior-level administrative appointments aimed at ensuring operational continuity and advancing reforms within the court's administrative framework.

District and Sessions, SHC, Judge Mohammad Laghari, presently serving as secretary of Supreme Judicial Council (BS-22), has been appointed as registrar (BS-22), Supreme Court, on deputation.

Fakhar Zaman, district and sessions judge, Peshawar High Court, currently serving as additional registrar (administration), has been appointed as director general (reforms) (BS-22) in the Supreme Court, also on deputation.

With advanced qualifications in law and development, Mr Zaman brings over three decades of experience in institutional reforms, policy innovation, and judicial education.

The Secretariat of the Supreme Judicial Council has requisitioned the services of Abid Rizwan Abid, District and Sessions Judge, LHC, for appointment as Secretary, Supreme Judicial Council (BS-22), on deputation.

Muhammad Abbas Zaidi, deputy registrar (judicial) (BS-20), has been assigned the current charge of additional registrar (judicial) (BS-21), while Zulfikar Ahmed, deputy registrar, posted as officer in-charge, Karachi registry branch, has been assigned the current charge of additional registrar (BS-21), Karachi registry.

Mohammad Safdar Mehmood, deputy registrar, posted as officer in-charge, Lahore registry branch, has been assigned the current charge of additional registrar (BS-21), Lahore registry.

Mujahid Mehmood, deputy registrar, Peshawar registry branch, has been assigned the current charge of additional registrar, Peshawar registry.

Fawad Ahmad, deputy registrar, has been assigned the current charge of additional registrar, and Sohail Ahmad, deputy registrar (administration) (BS-20), has been assigned the current charge of additional registrar (administration) (BS-21).—Nasir Iqbal

IFJ slams growing crisis faced by journalists in Pakistan

Pakistani journalists visit SNJ headquarters in Paris

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) held talks with International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) President Dominique Pradali and Secretary General Anthony Bellanger at the Syndicat National des Journalistes (SNJ) headquarters in Paris, according to a statement issued from Islamabad on Saturday. The high-level meeting aimed to address the escalating crisis facing journalists in Pakistan.

The IFJ leaders expressed deep concern over targeted killings of journalists, misuse of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) to file cases against media workers, undeclared censorship, harassment by state and non-state actors, forced layoffs, and non-payment of salaries. They urged Pakistan's president, prime minister, and top judge to take immediate notice, warning that inaction could prompt an appeal to the United Nations for intervention.

During the meeting, the PFUJ delegation, including Secretary General Shakeel Ahmed, Rawalpindi-Islamabad Union of Journalists President Tariq Usmani, and Foreign Committee Head Waseem Shahzad Qadri, briefed the IFJ leaders on ground realities.

In a joint statement, Mr Pradali and Mr Bellanger condemned "unlawful" actions against journalists, demanded the immediate withdrawal of Peca-based cases, called for robust legislation to protect journalists' rights, and stressed on the need for taking legal action against those responsible for targeted killings.

'Undeclared censorship'

They also denounced "undeclared censorship" imposed by government institutions, terming it "unconstitutional and undemocratic".

Highlighting the forced layoffs affecting hundreds of media workers, the IFJ officials urged Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to introduce urgent and robust legislation to halt what they described as the "economic massacre" of journalists in Pakistan.

The federation pledged full support to PFUJ and said the issue will be placed on the agenda of the upcoming IFJ Congress.

Mr Pradali and Mr Bellanger also raised concerns over alleged death threats to PFUJ President Rana Muhammad Azeem and others, reportedly from Taliban-linked groups, and called for a thorough investigation to ensure those responsible face full legal consequences.

IHC rules PTA's role limited to licensing, tariffs

Court says CCP should act against anti-competitive practices instead

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has ruled that the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) — not the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) — has the jurisdiction to investigate and act against mobile phone companies accused of anti-competitive practices.

The landmark ruling by Justice Raja Inaam Ameen Minhas settles a long-standing jurisdictional dispute between the two federal regulators and clarifies that the CCP holds statutory authority to ensure fair competition in all sectors, including telecommunications.

The judgement was issued on Saturday in a series of writ petitions filed by major mobile network operators — Jazz, Telenor, Zong and Ufone — challenging the CCP's show-cause notices and inquiries. The companies had argued that since the telecom industry is already regulated by the PTA under the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organisation) Act, 1996, the CCP could not exercise parallel oversight.

Rejecting this argument, Justice Minhas held that the Competition Act, 2010 gives the CCP exclusive jurisdiction to regulate market competition across all sectors of the economy, without exception.

He observed that the PTA's functions are limited to licensing, tariff approval, spectrum management, and technical regulation — not issues of market dominance or collusive behaviour.

"The PTA may regulate services, licensing, and technical compliance, but it is the Competition Commission that ensures fair play and prevents abuse of market power," the judge wrote in his detailed verdict. "The existence of a sectoral regulator does not oust the jurisdiction of the CCP in enforcing the Competition Act."

The court emphasised that the CCP's jurisdiction covers all undertakings — whether in telecom, banking, energy, or manufacturing — and that no special exemption exists for telecom operators. Justice Minhas described the CCP as the "federal watchdog for fair competition," responsible for protecting consumers and markets from anti-competitive conduct, price-fixing, and cartelisation.

He also clarified that the IHC had territorial jurisdiction over the matter since both the CCP and PTA are headquartered in federal capital and the impugned proceedings originated from the CCP's Islamabad office.

During the hearings, the CCP argued that the telecom operators' petitions were an attempt to evade lawful investigation into alleged market collusion and abuse of dominance.

The commission maintained that restricting such matters solely to the PTA would leave anti-competitive behaviour unchecked in the telecom sector.

Justice Minhas endorsed this view, noting that "the presence of a sector-specific regulator cannot create an enclave of immunity from general competition law". He observed that Pakistan's legislative framework, modeled on international best practices, envisions coexistence — not exclusion — between the CCP and other regulators.

Concluding the judgement, Justice Minhas reaffirmed that the CCP has the legal and constitutional mandate to regulate competitive behaviour in the telecom sector, while the PTA's role remains confined to technical and operational regulation.

October becomes deadliest month for militants in a decade: study

• PICSS says 355 militants and 72 security personnel died • 31 kidnapped in Balochistan, 18 in KP's tribal areas • Three militant attacks took place in Sindh, one in Punjab • 2,853 deaths recorded in the first 10 months of 2025

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: Militants suffered their heaviest losses in a decade during October this year, as security forces intensified counter-militancy operations across several regions of the country, according to data compiled by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).

The monthly figures show that 458 people were killed in October, including 355 militants, 72 security personnel, 30 civilians, and one member of a pro-government peace committee. Another 162 people were injured — 92 security personnel, 48 civilians, and 22 militants. Security forces arrested 22 suspected militants, while militants kidnapped 55 people, marking the highest number of abductions in a single month in 10 years.

The PICSS Militancy Database recorded a 29 per cent increase in militant attacks — rising from 69 in September to 89 in October — though overall human losses in these attacks fell by 19pc. A total of 109 people were killed in militant-initiated violence, including 55 security personnel, 29 civilians, 24 militants, and one peace committee member. These attacks also left 134 people injured — 88 security personnel, 45 civilians, and one militant.

In Balochistan, 23 militant attacks were reported in October compared to 21 in September, but casualties dropped sharply from 79 to 27. Among the dead were 16 security personnel, eight militants, and three civilians. The number of injured fell from 122 to 36, including 15 security personnel, 20 civilians, and one militant. However, militants kidnapped 31 people — mostly labourers — during October.

Security forces killed 67 militants in various operations, the highest monthly militant death toll in the province since 2002, when the current wave of militancy began. The report described this as a significant improvement in the province's security situation, noting a 92pc decline in civilian deaths and a 52pc drop in security personnel fatalities.

In tribal districts (erstwhile Fata) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 22 militant attacks were recorded — the same as in September — but casualties increased considerably. Thirty-one people were killed, including 18 security personnel and 13 civilians, while 45 were injured — 32 security personnel and 13 civilians.

Militants also kidnapped 18 people from the region. The data showed a 200pc rise in security personnel deaths, up from six to 18, and a 48 per cent overall increase in fatalities. Security operations in the region killed 209 militants, the highest single-month militant death toll since November 2014. Sixteen security personnel were also killed in these operations, including during the deadliest incident in Orakzai district, which triggered border tensions with Afghanistan.

The PICSS confirmed that security forces also eliminated banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan's former deputy emir and shadow defence minister, Qari Amjad, in Bajaur — the most high-profile TTP death since the group's inception in 2007.

In mainland KP, 37 militant attacks took place in October compared to 25 in September, resulting in 48 deaths — 21 security personnel, 10 civilians, 16 militants, and one peace committee member. Forty-two people were injured, including 35 security personnel and seven civilians, while four people were kidnapped.

Security operations killed 55 militants, while one security personnel lost his life. The PICSS data showed that militant deaths in operations fell from 88 in September to 55 in October.

In Sindh, three militant attacks killed three civilians and injured seven people, including four civilians and three security personnel. The report also noted increased activity of the Iran-backed Al-Zainabiyun Brigade, with eight suspected militants, including key commanders, arrested. The outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army targeted the Jaffar Express in Sindh's Shikarpur district with an IED, derailing four bogies and injuring seven passengers.

Gilgit-Baltistan witnessed three attacks, including two attempted target killings apparently carried out by the Al-Zainabiyun Brigade, while the TTP abducted two officials of the Water and Power Development Authority.

In Punjab, one low-intensity attack occurred when TTP militants blew up a gas pipeline in Mianwali district. Security forces also arrested an Al-Qaeda operative from Okara district.

Cumulatively, the PICSS recorded 2,853 deaths in the first 10 months of 2025 — including 1,734 militants, 601 security personnel, 497 civilians, and 21 pro-government combatants. The institute concluded that while militant violence persists, the sharp rise in militant deaths reflects the growing effectiveness of the country's counter-militancy operations.